



CEPPS/IRI West Bank-Gaza Quarterly Report: January 1 – March 31, 2005

West Bank-Gaza: Polling and Survey Research

USAID Cooperative Agreement Number: DCG-A-00-01-00004-00

Project Dates: November 2003 – November 2005

Total Budget: \$389,388.00 Expenses to Date: \$313,905

Project # 7086

I. SUMMARY

The call to reform Palestinian governing institutions is not a new one, yet following the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in November 2004, and the Palestinian Presidential election in early January 2005, there is a sense of urgency and optimism that could carry the Palestinians forward. The political dynamics in the West Bank and Gaza have shifted dramatically and key issues of reform, transparency, elections, and citizen participation that have been debated for years – but sidelined by entrenched political interests – have now surfaced. Coverage of these issues now takes precedence on the front pages of local newspapers, on radio programs, in legislative council sessions, and in private conversations among Palestinians, young and old, male and female, in every town.

In its most tangible form, the opportunity to increase citizen participation, establish stronger democratic institutions, and root out corruption will come through elections at the municipal, legislative, and executive levels – the first elections to be conducted since 1996. The first round of municipal council elections, held on December 23, 2004, in 26 municipalities throughout the West Bank and on January 27, 2005, in 10 municipalities in Gaza, demonstrated the intense desire of Palestinians to participate in the political process. The presidential election, held on January 9, 2005, affirmed Palestinian commitment to the democratic process with little violence and a majority of Palestinians indicating that the election was fair. Although parliamentary elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), tentatively scheduled for July 17, 2005, will offer the first opportunity for competition on a large scale between mainstream political parties, the Islamic opposition, and independent candidates, the January municipal council elections in Gaza demonstrated that Islamist groups – namely Hamas – may easily translate community support into electoral victories. Fatah, the ruling mainstream political party, aptly recognizes that it may no longer ignore the increasing popularity of such groups and has begun negotiations to bring Hamas into political positions of decision-making authority.

During this period of transition, survey research conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Development Studies Program (DSP) is of critical importance in order to convey to political leaders and organizations important indications of public opinion. In this quarter, to provide preliminary voting results and information about the behavior of the Palestinian electorate, IRI supported DSP in conducting a Presidential election-day exit poll (released January 9, 2005). Issue 47 of the monthly newspaper, *Al Baydar*, was also published during this period.

II. PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

To provide regular and timely polls and surveys gauging public sentiment in the West Bank and Gaza on a range of issues according to strict scientific standards.

III. QUARTERLY ACTIVITIES

Data for the exit poll was collected by 450 field researchers on January 9, 2005, in 146 geographic locations and 153 voting stations throughout Gaza and the West Bank, including Jerusalem. 1150 voters participated in the exit poll. The poll's large sample allowed for demographic analysis by sub-region, between various age groups, and between men and women.

Despite long-held Palestinian dissatisfaction with Palestinian Authority (PA) institutions that, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, were neither accountable nor transparent, and corruption among the dominant Fatah movement and the PA leadership, of which Mahmoud Abbas has been a key member, Abbas won broad support (62.53%) from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to assume the position of Chairman of the Palestinian Authority. Independent candidate Mustapha Barghouthi achieved a strong showing in second-place, garnering 19.48% of the vote. The remaining five candidates received between 1% and 4% of the vote.

Poll results confirm that changes in the political context have ushered in a period of renewed optimism. Of those surveyed, 73.8% considered the election to be conducted in a free and fair manner, while 21.2% felt they were fair to a certain degree. Furthermore, the large majority of respondents believed the elections would result in: improvement of the performance of the PA (83.7%); a resumption of negotiations with Israel (76.4%); improvement of the economic situation (81.3%); a lessening of the suffering at Israeli checkpoints (76.8%); and an improvement in internal security (80.6%). A smaller percentage (57.1%) felt the elections would assist in Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian cities, the issue of greatest concern (28.7%) among those polled.

The poll also indicated that 34.4% of voters decided for whom to cast their ballot in the last week before the election and 65.7% had decided in the last month or earlier. In terms of selecting a candidate, the most important consideration was the candidate's political affiliation (15.8%), integrity (11.5%), ability to improve economic conditions (9.4%), ability to achieve democracy (7.6%), and his religious reputation (1.2%). Of those polled, respondents indicated that 55.9% support Fatah, 8.7% support Hamas, and 6.8% support the Palestinian National Initiative (PNI). Poll results did not indicate significant differences between the West Bank and Gaza.

The findings of the poll elicited extensive coverage in numerous Arabic and English print outlets. These articles are included as attachments.

Arabic:

- Al-Ayyam Newspaper: (January 10, 2005)
- Al-Hayat Newspaper: (January 10, 2005)

English:

- The Jerusalem Post: “US NGO and Bir Zeit to do PA Election Exit Polling” (January 8, 2005)
- Haaretz: “Mahmoud Abbas Declares Victory in Election for PA Chair” (January 10, 2005)
- Los Angeles Times: “Abbas’ Voice Resonates with Palestinians: Polls Show an Openness to a New Direction” (January 11, 2005)

In preparation for the election-day exit poll, IRI provided technical consultations and support to DSP. David Williams, an experienced exit pollster with diverse international experience, traveled to the West Bank and Gaza in the week prior to the election to assist with methodological design and sampling methods. Strategy planning sessions were held with field supervisors in Ramallah on January 2 and in Gaza on January 4. Williams also assisted DSP Director Nader Said in training more than 300 fieldworkers deployed in the West Bank and more than 100 fieldworkers in Gaza. Day-long training sessions were held in Ramallah on January 3 and Gaza on January 5 which walked interviewers, mostly university students, through all aspects of the poll’s conduct.

IRI MENA Deputy Director Scott Mastic and Political Consultant Kent Patton were present in Palestine on election-day to assist with the poll’s conduct and worked with DSP on release of the poll on election night.

IRI also supported DSP in publishing the 47th issue of its monthly newspaper, which addresses social, economic, and political development issues. The current edition includes perspectives on post-election reform needs, priorities, and expectations.

IV. RESULTS AND INDICATORS

Result #1: Surveys will be conducted and published on a regular and timely basis

Indicator: Polling will be conducted on a regular basis and in response to developments on the political front;
IRI supported DSP in conducting a Presidential election-day exit poll to provide preliminary voting results and information about the behavior of the Palestinian electorate.

- Indicator: Poll results will be communicated to local and international leaders and decision makers;
Following the closing of the polling stations, DSP held a press conference to announce exit poll results. DSP and IRI also disseminated exit poll results and analysis via telephone, fax, email, and their respective websites to key political figures, representatives of civil society institutions, and the media.
- Indicator: Poll results will be reported on in the local and international media;
Results from the Presidential election-day exit poll were covered extensively in both Arabic and English print media at the local and international level.
- Result #2: An indigenous source for polling and survey research will be sustained and strengthened
- Indicators: DSP will retain its reputation as the premier source of data on public opinion in the Palestinian territories;
DSP strengthened its reputation as the premier source of data on public opinion in the Palestinian territories as indicated by extensive media coverage and requests for local and satellite TV and radio interviews.
- Indicators: DSP polling methodologies will be strengthened through ongoing technical assistance and training;
IRI trainer Kent Patton held consultations with DSP Survey Research Director Dr. Nader Said regarding the development of appropriate polling methodologies for the conduct of the Presidential election-day exit poll.